



**UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA
FACULDADE DE TEOLOGIA**

MESTRADO INTEGRADO EM TEOLOGIA (*1.º grau canónico*)

GREGORIO

**THE MISSION OF THE PONTIFICAL INSTITUTE
FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS IN MYANMAR**

**Dissertação Final
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**Lisboa
2015**

APPROVAL SHEET

**THE MISSION OF THE PONTIFICAL INSTITUTE FOR FOREIGN
MISSIONS IN MYANMAR**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First of all, I would like to thank to all professors who have been helping me during my academic years at the University of Saint Joseph (USJ). I also like to give thanks to the Dominican family at St. Dominic's Prior in Macau for their fraternal cares and supports. My gratitude also goes to those who have been helping me in one way or another. Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude to most of all Prof. Chan Kai Yung Anna, my supervisor and professor in Liturgical subject for her guidance, understanding, patience.

ABBREVIATIONS

Acts	Acts of the Apostles
AG	Ad Gentes
ARDA	Association of Religion Data Archives
CBCM	Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar
John	Gospel of St. John
LG	Lumen Gentium
Matt	Gospel of St. Matthew
MEP	Paris Foreign Mission
PIME	Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions
USJ	University of Saint Joseph
1Tm	First Letter of St. Paul to Timothy

INTRODUCTION

After prayerfully and carefully contemplating on many options of topic for the practicum, the researcher finally makes up his mind choosing the following topic: “The Mission of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions in Myanmar.” But no matter what a topic is chosen, it is always a challenge to explore. Just like to be a missionary, especially to be a Dominican priest as a missionary, is potentially challenging. Therefore, the analyser has been choosing this topic for the purpose of understanding more about the mission of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (abbreviated as PIME in this paper).¹ Hoping that by making this, the writer will know more about how to be a missionary.

Very often, many people love to tell the story about the works which have been done by someone else in the past. But do they want to leave the story of their works for the future generation? It is a question. For example, the missionaries like PIME who has done marvellous works in Myanmar. So since the people could tell about the works of the PIME, why not they make their works known and remembered in the other part of the world for the future. If there is no one to do this, then the researcher will try his best to make a research for those who are interested in this topic. The Catholic Church has a long history. So unless there was something to say about the Church in the past, it cannot be said in the present and the future. Thus, where there is a church there must

¹ In Latin: *Pontificium Institutum pro Missionibus Exteris*.

be missionaries and their mission.

In this paper the researcher would like to talk about how Christianity came to Myanmar. The first part of this paper will discuss a brief historical background and the early Christianity in Myanmar. The second part will present the work of the modern day's missionaries, especially, the beginning of the PIME Missionaries. Finally, the paper will talk about the method and success of the PIME mission in Myanmar, and it will terminate with a short conclusion.

CHAPTER ONE

A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY IN MYANMAR²

1. A Brief History of Myanmar

Myanmar, also known as Burma, is apparently one of the poorest nations in Southeast Asia, suffering from decades of stagnation, mismanagement and isolation. Actually, “Myanmar is historically one of the richest countries in natural resources such as gold, silver, ruby, metal, lead, antimony and jade in South East Asia.”³ Myanmar has been given many names such as the “land of Golden pagodas” and the “land of smiles.” But in recent times the name most appropriate is “the land of Green Ghosts.” According to Burmese spirit (nat) beliefs, “the land of Green Ghosts is the spirits of the persons who die of violent deaths - green ghosts, restlessly seek justice and revenge. They will not rest till the perpetrators of their unjust deaths are brought to justice.”⁴

The majority of people in Myanmar are Buddhists. According to ARDA statistics, in 2010, “74.69% are Buddhists, 9.54% Ethno-religionist, 7.89% Christians, 3.77% Muslims, 1.71% Hindus, and others 2.40%.”⁵ Catholics are approximately 1%

² In the paper, I will use the term Myanmar, it refers to the past day Burma. In the old days, Burma is used but unfortunately most young people are more familiar with the term Myanmar imposed by the military regime. This is the reason why sometimes both of the names are used interchangeably.

³ Fr. Akohla, *The footsteps of Ava* (Yangon: Catholic Major Seminary Press, 1974), 51.

⁴ Anna May Say Pa, *Doing Mission From the Underside: A Biblical-Theological Understanding from a Myanmar Perspective*. (Philippine: The 6th Congress in Iloilo City, in Feb 2009), 31.

⁵ Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA): Myanmar (2010). (accessed on Tuesday April 7, 2015). http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_37_1.asp

of the country's population.

2. Early Missionaries

Myanmar first encountered “Christianity as early as 1044-1287 when the Nestorian Christians accompanied the Tartar Chinese soldiers of Emperor Kublai Khan came to what is now the territory of Burma”. These Christians came to fight against the “Bermans”⁶ during the period of Bagan dynasties.”⁷ Bagan was once a flourishing kingdom, archaeological evidence of this ancient kingdom show that there were “some frescoes contain crosses, Latin and Greek words.”⁸

The “Christian presence in the 14th and 15th centuries was represented by the Europeans especially the Portuguese merchants who came to look for opportunities of merchandise in the different parts of Burma.”⁹ It was the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama¹⁰ who discovered a way to Asia particularly to India. He was the most successful commander to sail from Portugal to Asia. “After the discovery of the route to India by Vasco da Gama in 1497, Portuguese Missionaries set out to the Far East as chaplains

⁶ Some ancient texts call the natives as “Bermans” or “Burmans” or the more widely received term of “Burmese”, but all refer to the natives living in the regions now known as Burma. This will also clarify the terms used after the Military regime when the country changed its name from the more popular “Burma” to “Myanmar”.

⁷ Samuel N. Lynn, “Challenges, Problems, and Prospects of Theological Education in Myanmar,” *CTC Bulletin*, Vol.XXII, No. 1 (April 2006), 1.

⁸ Moses Dereh and Matthias Nga Reh, “Glimpses of Myanmar,” *Life Today* 33 (2012), 26.

⁹ Samuel N. Lynn, “Challenges, Problems, and Prospects of Theological Education in Myanmar,” *CTC Bulletin*, Vol.XXII, No. 1 (April 2006), 1.

¹⁰ News Paper “World of Wonder,” *Times Extra: Weekend Guide* (19. 04. 2013), 18.

to Portuguese soldiers, sailors and settlers.”¹¹ Foreign Christians at this time were greatly welcomed by the different kingdoms in South and Southeast Asia since these men considered skillful in military and technical skills. And with them came the priests who took care of the spiritual welfare of the soldiers and explorers. “Due to the rich land of Burma, Portuguese traders were attracted and by 1510, after having founded Goa as the ‘Seaport to the East’, they also made significant excursions to different parts of Myanmar - Mergui, Tavoy (now Dawei), Siam (Thanlyin) and Akyab (Sittwe) befriending the King of Pegu.”¹²

The Portuguese arrived in Burma first at Arakan (Rakhin), in the West of Myanmar while sailing along the cost shores from India. They then spread over other parts of the country. Therefore, “the Catholic activity began with the advent of the first Portuguese settlers. Their activity was however mobile as they followed these settlers wherever they went and there was nothing stable or permanent in their mission organization. It was thus a nomadic missionary effort.”¹³ At a time Portuguese soldiers were very significant for the Church of Burma. The purpose for Portuguese soldiers to come to Burma was not for mission, but for merchandise. Though they did play an important part for the Catholic Church. Because of the soldiers, the missionaries could come to Burma by accompanying and chaplaining them. The missionaries, especially

¹¹ Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar (CBCM), *Official Catholic Directory* (Yangon: CBCM, 2007), 7.

¹² *Ibid.*, 7. All these places can be found in Lower Burma. Pegu was the former capital of the kingdom of Mon, where it is about 76 kms Northeast of Yangon.

¹³ Vivian. Ba, *The Early Catholic Missionaries in Burma: A Study of their Manuscripts and the First Casting and printing of Burmese Alphabets, Outline Grammar, and Catechism in 1776, from Latin, Italian, Portuguese and French Sources* (Paris: The Guardian, August 1962), 2.

the Franciscan, Dominicans and Jesuit, could spread the seeds of the Catholic Church from the south west through the middle of country in Burma.

3. Religious Orders

The following names of the Orders: Franciscan, Dominican and Jesuit, are not arranged according to the chronological order. Although the Franciscan Order is believed to be the first to arrive in Myanmar, more or less these three Orders were doing their mission at the same time but in the different places.

3.1 The Franciscans

Instead, "a Friar Pierre Bornter who was a French Franciscan spent three years in Pegu, learning the language and the customs of the people between 1554- 1557."¹⁴ Accordingly "Friar Pierre Bonifer, a Frenchman was the first European to gain any insight into the doctrines of the Burmese Buddhists. When Bonifer was in India, he had probably been told, even as the Jesuits had earlier heard in Coimbra, that "if a father... were to go there [to Pegu] then all the people would become Christians."¹⁵ One source claims that "In 1555 Father Peter Bonfer, a Doctor of the University of Paris, accompanied by a Father Peter Paschasius, left Mylapor to Pegu."¹⁶ While another said that he went to Pegu in an unknown date (probably in the fall of 1565 which is quite

¹⁴ Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar (CBCM), *Official Catholic Directory*, (Yangon: CBCM, 2007), 7. Another book mentions Friar Peter Bornter in the different way: Instead of using the name "Peter Bornter", it is called "Pierre Bonifer" that sounds closer.

¹⁵ Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe*, vol I: *The Century of Discovery* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1945), 557-558.

¹⁶ E.J. MacCarthy, *The History of the Catholic Church in Burma* (Navan, Ireland: Columba Press, 1995), 33.

late from the date given above), though historians seem to accept the only credible date of his arrival to Pegu would be around 1554-1557 especially in the year of 1555.

Documents record that “Fr. Pierre Bonifer remained at Bassein for some time, studying the Mon language, reading native books on the Buddhism, and tending to the religious needs of the Portuguese colony.”¹⁷ But he was not able to evangelize properly because the reigning monarch, King Byin Naung was encouraging a fervent Buddhist revival in the whole kingdom. “Fr. Bonifer disputed with some of the Buddhist priests of Pegu, and was railed at as an impostor and a trouble-maker. Finally, on the advice of his Portuguese friends who had heard threats made against him, Bonifer left Bassein in fear of his life.”¹⁸

“Again, in 1595, the conflict raised among all various kings in the south of Burma. The king of Arakan entrusted a certain Felipe da Britto (Portuguese), a captain of a band of mercenary troops to capture the port of Syriam (south Myanmar). Felipe da Britto captured Syriam but refused to return it to his Master the Arakanese king. Britto ruled supreme by this time.”¹⁹

The lists of Franciscans (O.F.M):

Fr. Pierre Bonfer, OFM (1555-1557) at Pegu

Fr. Peter Paschasius OFM

Fr. Alpohonse Cyprian OFM at Pegu

Fr. Eleuterio de Santiago 1594-1599 at Pegu

Fr. Joao de Corda OFM 1594-? at Pegu

¹⁷ Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe*, vol I: *The Century of Discovery* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1945), 558.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 558.

¹⁹ Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar (CBCM), *Official Catholic Directory* (Yangon: CBCM, 2007), 7.

Fr. Francisco Landeyro OFM 1599-?
Fr. Rafael de Sao Francisco at Pegu 1620-1634
Fr. Francisco das Chagas at Syriam 1640, expelled by King
Thadohmma in 1648²⁰

3.2 The Dominicans

There was a particular place in Myanmar called Arakan where Christianity was first introduced. And “The first priests were Dominicans who catered for the spiritual welfare of the Portuguese.”²¹ While the other resource said According to Father Andre-Marie, in his “Dominican Missions of the Far East’ published at Paris in 1865, claims that the Dominicans had missions in pre-Portuguese time in India and Siam.”²² In this case if they were truly in India then they must reach to Siam in the south of Burma by either land or water. It is said that “Hieronimo di Santo Stephano, who visited Pegu in 1496, buried his comrade who died there in a ruined Church frequented by none. The Church is believed to be built by Armenian or Syrian traders in the port and it may have been served by Dominicans.”²³

The list of Dominicans, O.P:

Fr. Melchio da Luz, O.P at Pegu where he died in 1604
Fr. Franciscond’Annunciacao, O.P at Syriam in 1604, 1610, 1616, at
Pegu 1627
Fr. Antonio Olivares, O.P at Pegu in 1604

²⁰ James. U Myint Swe, “Early Portuguese in Burma (16th & 17th Centuries)”. *National Church History of Myanmar*. Ed. Peter Sein haling Oo (Yangon: St. Joseph’s Catholic Major Seminary, November 2014), 47.

²¹ *History of the Catholic Church in Burma (Myanmar)* (Yangon: Catholic Major Seminary, Institute of Theology, 2000), 26.

²² E.J. MacCarthy, *The History of the Catholic Church in Burma* (Navan, Ireland: Columba Press, 1995), 33.

²³ *Ibid.*,

Fr. Georges des Ursins, O.P, 1627

Fr. Gonzalo O.P and Fr. Manoel Fereyra O.P killed at Syriam. It said that these two priests were put in prison around 1615.²⁴

In Portuguese times the first missionaries to come to Burma were Dominicans. Hence they had a right to the Portuguese title “Protectors of the Christians,” that is to say, the Order was officially in charge of conversion-work and responsible for the converts. The port towns, Martaban, Mergui, pegu, Syriam and Bassein became centres of foreign trade as a result of a peace and trade agreement concluded in 1519.²⁵ However, the Dominicans do not seem to have had priests to spare for Burma. It was recorded that Franciscans are the one seems to be evangelizing during that time.²⁶

By this time, Francis Xavier (1506-1552) whose name is intimately connected with Christian Church in Goa, Malaya and Japan, wrote to his Jesuit brothers in Europe mentioning Pegu, and making it clear that missionaries were needed to be sent.²⁷ Unfortunately, none of his Jesuit confreres came to Pegu.

3.3 The Jesuits

There was another Order, the Jesuit, settling in a key port in the town of Syriam. When Philip de Britto was in Syriam, he brought with him a Jesuit, Fr. John Andrew Boves. Fr. John Andrew Boves was the very first Jesuit worked in Burma. He was later

²⁴ James U Myint Swe (Canada), “Early Portuguese in Burma (16th & 17th Centuries)” National Church History of Myanmar: ed. Peter Sein haling Oo (Yangon: St. Joseph’s Catholic Major Seminary November 2014), 48-49.

²⁵ E.J. MacCarthy, *The History of the Catholic Church in Burma* (Navan, Ireland: Columba Press, 1995), 33.

²⁶ *Ibid.*,

²⁷ Cf. Moses Dereh and Matthias Nga Reh, “Glimpses of Myanmar,” *Life Today* 33 (2012), 26.

replaced by two other Jesuits, Fathers Deigo Nunes and Natal Salerno.²⁸ Fr. Boves and a certain Father Fernandez were found working among the Portuguese in the kingdom of Arakan on the western coast of Burma a few years later.

On the other hand, "king Anaukphetlun, in the north, succeeded to the throne of Ava (now Mandalay) in 1610 and immediately began uniting the kingdom."²⁹ He conquered Prome (Pyay) which is in Pagu division now and Toungoo just near the Prome in Myanmar. Then king Anaukphetlun with his victorious army proceeded to the South where de Britto ruled. When the king Anaukphetlun arrived in the south, even though Britto and petty king, Nat Shin Naung, resisted King Anaukphetlun's troops, there was no success.³⁰

King Anaukphetlun and his army captured de Britto and Nat Shin Naung alive and they were put to death. Likewise, King Anaukphetlun and his army also took all the remainder (of the lost army) about 5,000 Britto's soldiers and their wives and children as prisoners to the north, Ava. Among them a certain Father da Fonseca was included.³¹

²⁸ Cf. Sigmund J. Laschenski, "Jesuit Assignment to Burma". *National Church History of Myanmar*, ed. Fr. Peter Sein Hlaing Oo (L. H. E.). (Yangon: St. Joseph's Catholic Major Seminary, 2014), 61.

²⁹ Ava was originally pronounced "Ungwa or Inwa". Its official name was Ratunapura (the city of Gems)." Ava is also called "mouth of the lake." Ava was the former capital of the Burmese Kingdom for more than four hundred years. It was founded by a Shan Prince Thadominphya in 1364 on an Island between river Ayeyawaddy and Myitnge, and destroyed by Mon in 1752.

³⁰ Cf. Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar (CBCM), *Official Catholic Directory* (Yangon: CBCM, 2007), 7

³¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 8.

Fortunately, there was a little change when “the new king Thalun was succeeded Anaukphetlun who had been a bad king and had brought the people including Fr. Manoel da Fonseca to the north kingdom of Ava. King Thalun was known as a good and kind King helping all the prisoners kept by his Predecessor Anaukphetlun. “King Thalun gave a piece of land to each of them and allowed them to build a church of their own. At that time, Fr. Augustine de Jesus from Lisbon visited Ava and he found more than 4000 Christians who had been taken prisoners at the fortress of Syriam.”³² Those prisoners were taken care of by Fr. Manoel da Fonseca with a few helpers who used to come to him.

In 1639 when he was sixty years old, he wrote to the Provincial, asking for a replacement, because he himself might retire to India. He had not seen another priest for many years. But the following year Father Denis Antunes arrived to replace him.³³ Fr. Antunes did not stay in Burma very long due to his health reason. He returned to India and Fr. Da Fonseca was left alone again, until another priest Fr. Simon Rodriguez appeared in 1655. Then at the age of seventy two, Fr. Da Fonseca retired and died soon at Goa while Fr. Rodrigues continued working in the Kingdom of Pegu. That was the last news of him.

Furthermore, “the annual letter of the Jesuits in India mentioned some very valuable data about the growth of Christianity in the kingdom of Ava. The famous letter

³² *Ibid.*, 8.

³³ Cf. Sigmund J. Laschenski, “Jesuit Assignment to Burma”. *National Church History of Myanmar*, ed. Fr. Peter Sein Hlaing Oo (L. H. E.). (Yangon: St. Joseph’s Catholic Major Seminary, 2014), 62.

of 1644, listed the statistics of the Catholic Church at that time. There were eight villages as the following.

1. Ava. Patron: Our Lady of Hope.	150 Christians
2. Nabaca ³⁴ , Patron: St John The Baptist	300 Christians
3. Latora (Chaung Oo)	400 Christians
4. Tabayam (Tabayin)	400 Christians
5. Macobo (Shwe Bo)	70 Christians
6. Allam (Halin)	60 Christians
7. Sikim	200 Christians
8. Singuem	80 Christians

³⁵

Below is the list of the Jesuits who worked in Burma at the beginning of 17th century in Syriam, Pegu and Ava:

Autunes, Fr. Denis (at Pegu in 1644, at Ava in 1648)
 Boves, Fr. Andrew (at Syriam, 28 March 1600)
 Da Fonseca, Fr. Manoel (Syriam and Ava, 1613-1652)
 Grecus, Fr. John Mary (at Pegu, 1608-1616)
 Nunes Fr. Blasius (at Syriam in February 1604)
 Nunes, Fr. Diego (at Syriam 1604-1613)
 Pimenta, Fr. Nicholas (at one time between 1600 and 1613 in Syriam)
 Pires, Fr. Emmanuel (at Pegu, 1613)
 Podrigues, Fr. Simon (at Ava 1652-1655, at Pegu 1655-1659)
 Salerno, Fr. Natalis (at Syriam in February 1604)³⁶

³⁴ The south of Ava, a distance of 30 leagues.

³⁵ Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar (CBCM), *Official Catholic Directory* (CBCM. Yangon, 2007), 8. All those places are understood to be near the river of Ayeyawaddy which is quite long and is flowing from the north to the south of Burma. Therefore, the missionary seemed to follow Irrawaddy evangelizing those places.

³⁶ James U Myint Swe (Canada), "Early Portuguese in Burma (16th & 17th Centuries)". National Church History of Myanmar: ed. Peter Sein Haling Oo (Yangon: St. Joseph's Catholic Major Seminary November 2014), 95.

Very soon, various foreign religious congregations from Europe came to the different parts of Burma. “Throughout the 17th century, there were Christians and their priests in the ports of the south kingdom of Myanmar Pegu and Arakan. Fr. Sebastian Manrique, Augustinian in Arakan; other Augustinians in Syriam (now Thanlyin Rangoon) and Martaban Thaton (south Myanmar); a Franciscan and Dominican in Pegu; two Theatines, Fr. Gallo in Arakan and Fr. Bernard Arconati in Pegu.”³⁷

3.4 The MEP Missionaries

It was also the time for the first introduction of The Paris Foreign Missions (MEP), and it is said that through the help of Burmese Ambassador from Siam (now Thailand), Fathers Genoud and Joret, came to Burma.³⁸ Fr. Jean Genoud (MEP) was born at Fribourg, Switzerland, in 1650 and was ordained and sent to the Mission of Siam in 1680. He was then sent to Syriam in 1687. Fr. Rene Joret (MEP) was born at Moulins (Aliers) in 1656 and was ordained in France and sent to the Mission of Siam; worked in Cambodia; in 1687 he was sent to Syriam. Both reached Pegu and wherever they were assigned they always had achievement such as set up school, dispensary. By seeing the Missionary’s success and their influence, the natives, particular the king of Ava, killed them to death at Ava in 1693, at the age of 43 and 37.³⁹ After the

³⁷ Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar (CBCM), *Official Catholic Directory* (Yangon: CBCM, 2007), 8.

³⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*

³⁹ Cf. James U Myint Swe (Canada), “Early Portuguese in Burma (16th & 17th Centuries)” National Church History of Myanmar: ed. Peter Sein Haling Oo (Yangon: St. Joseph’s Catholic Major Seminary November 2014), 49.

assassination of these two priests, there were many more around 18 priests were sent to Burma but not to Pegu and Ave. they were assigned at Tenasserim and Pergui.

3.5 The Barnabite Mission

Then, it was the time for Burma to be evangelized properly. In 1719 Pope Clement XI gave his formal act to let his legate Msgr. Carlo Ambrogio Mezzabarba to send Fr. Sigismond de Calchi, a Barnabite, and a diocesan priest, Fr. Vittoni, to go to the kingdoms of Pegu and Ava. Calchi was the Vicar Apostolic of Burma though he was still a priest. "The Holy See divided the Mission of Burma into two. The secular priests were entrusted with the Mission of Ava and the Mission of Pegu was left to the Barnabites."⁴⁰

However, the separation of those kingdoms, the Mission of Ava and the Mission of Pagu did not work effectively especially after the death of Fr. Calcai in 1730. Due to the scarcity of personnel, the two missions were combined once again. Fr. Gallizia was appointed a Vicar of the united mission as a successor of Fr. Calchi.

The Barnabites were extremely important for the Burma mission. They came to Asia under the auspices of the newly founded Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda Fide. Who are the Barnabites?

The Barnabites are members of a clerical Order whose official name is the "Clerics Regular of Saint Paul the Apostle". It was founded by Saint Antonio Maria

⁴⁰ Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar (CBCM), *Official Catholic Directory*, (Yangon: CBCM, 2007), 9.

Zaccharia in response to the Tridentine reform of the clergy. This congregation was approved by Pope Clement VII on February 18, 1533, and was confirmed by Pope Paul III on July 24, 1535. They were popularly known as Barnabites for their main Church was under the tutelage of St. Barnabas. The early Barnabites were famous for their deep spirituality and apostolic zeal. They called themselves “the clerics of St. Paul the Beheaded for their firm resolve to imitate the Apostle Paul even in his sufferings and martyrdom.”⁴¹

3.5.1 The First Group of Barnabites (1743)

"Bishop Gallizia and along with him three priests, Fr. Paolo Maria Nerini, Fr. Alexander Mondelli, Fr. John del Conte and a lay brother, Br. Angelo Cappello, were sent to Syriam and Pegu in Burma."⁴² However, after two years of being hard working as missionary, once on their way back by boat from Pegu to Syriam, they were killed when Peguans (now Mon) massacred several people. Only Brother Angelo and Fr. Nerini⁴³ survived and escaped this tragedy.

3.5.2 Second Group of Barnabites (1754)

Later Fr. Nerini was elected as a Bishop of the two kingdoms of Ava and Pegu by Pope Benedict XIV who later also sent four more missionaries to strengthen the mission in Ava and Pegu. The four fathers were Fr. Vincent Casanova, Fr. Leo Lindermann, Fr. Amadeo Gazzei and Fr. Hermengild Quardrio. It is said that these

⁴¹ Christian Bellazzi, “St. Anthony M. Zaccaria” (accessed on Friday, March 27, 2015). <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/religion/711021/posts?page=6>

⁴² Fr. Akohla, *The Footsteps of Ava* (Yangon: Catholic Major Seminary Press, 1974), 86.

⁴³ He was later consecrated as bishop.

missionaries were divided two by two into two groups. In 1754 they left for Burma from Italy. They had to bring many things which were sent by the brother of Bishop Nerini such as books, utensils and medicines for the Bishop Nerini.

Having heard that four missionaries were sent to Burma, Bishop Nerini was so happy and eagerly waiting to see them. Unfortunately, they never arrived in Burma as one of ships sunk in the Atlantic with all the passengers including two missionaries perished in the sea. The rest of the expedition continued their journey on another vessel but before arriving in their destination, it sunk on the Gulf of Martaban. Both of them died in that tragedy. Therefore, none of those four priests reached Burma. As a result, bishop Nerini and Bro. Angelo continued their mission all alone. However, around 1756, the war between the Talaings⁴⁴ and the Burmese under the leadership of King Alungpaya of Shwe bo broke out; Bishop Nerini was suspected of French ties and was beheaded. Br. Angelo too was killed by a cannon ball attack during the siege.⁴⁵

3.5.3 Third Group of Barnabites (1760)

In this stage there was much more work to do in Burma. Sheep without shepherd would suffer and held captive by the enemies. Many faithful were wondering because they lost their priests specifically bishop Nerini. But still there was good news for them that the third group of Barnabites would be sent to Burma from Italy. During this time there were already two Churches in Rangoon, The Church of Our Lady of Rosary and the Church of the Immaculate Conception.

⁴⁴ This is another term to refer to the Mon.

⁴⁵ Cf. Fr. Akohla, *The Footsteps of Ava* (Yangon: Catholic Major Seminary Press, 1974), 111-115.

In 1760, Fr. Sebastiano Donati and Fr. Pio Gallizia arrived in Burma. Fr. Donati was sent to upper Burma, to a city called Chaung U, Ava, while Fr. Pio Gallizia was assigned to the lower Burma, Rangoon.⁴⁶ After his shortly arrival in Chaung U, on 1761, 20 of January, Fr. Donati suffered from the disease in Oedema and died. Later on, Fr. Pio Gallizia was called from the Rangoon to replace Fr. Donati in Chaung U. He was also known as a good learner of Burmese language. A few months later in 1761 October, in order to help Fr. Gallizia, two new Barnabites, Fr. John Maria Percoto and Fr. Avenati from Italy arrived in Rangoon. Fr. Avenati was assigned in Rangoon, at the church of the Immaculate Conception of our Lady, where Fr. Gallizia had been assigned previous year. Fr. Percoto was sent to the upper of Burma to join Fr. Gallizia in Chaung U.⁴⁷ Although Fr. John Mary Percoto arrived safely in Chaung U, he soon got sick with no medicine and no doctor, only under the care and with the encouragement of Fr. Gallizia. He was amazed when he found out that there were some Catholics persevered in the faith which they had received 150 years ago. Fr. Percoto was able to recover from the sickness. But, “in February 1763, Fr. Pio Gallizia, suffered a serious disease and passed away in Chaung U where he was buried. In the same year, Fr. Avenati who was assigned in Rangoon also fell sick and died on Easter of that year (5 April 1763).”⁴⁸

By this time, only Fr. Percoto left behind continuing the Burmese mission alone. “In spite of his heavy schedule and responsibility Fr. Percoto still found time to write various works in Burmese such as Catechism Books, Mass Books, translation of the

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 128-129.

Gospels and the Epistles.”⁴⁹ This are just a few thing be mentioned, there are more things he had done, and which are immeasurable.

3.5.4 Fourth Group of Barnabites (1767)

This was the last group of Barnabites to be sent to Burma to help Fr. Percoto who is going to be appointed Apostolic Vicar.

The members of the last group of Barnabite missionaries are: 1) Rev. Fr. Melchior Carpani; 2) Fr. Antonio Filiberto Re; 3) Fr. Gherardo Cortenovis; 4) Fr. Ambrogio Miconi and the lay brother, and 5) Romualdo Bergonzi.⁵⁰

The hard work of the Barnabites for the Burmese Mission was well appreciated. However the missionaries sent to Burma rarely survived because of long journey through the oceans, the many tropical diseases which were very fatal to Europeans and if they survived, had always been under pressure from local political problems.

They were divided into two groups to go to Burma due to the difficulty of the ship. The first group was Fr. Melchior Carpani and Fr. Antonio Filiberto Re and the rest were the second group. When they arrived Burma Fr. Carpani was assigned at the Immaculate Conception Church in Rangoon while Fr. Filiberto Re proceeded to Upper Burma to meet Fr. Percoto and hand him all the things that they had brought from Rome especially, the documents of his appointment as Vicar Apostolic of the mission. “He

⁴⁹ Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar (CBCM), *Official Catholic Directory* (Yangon: CBCM, 2007), 10.

⁵⁰ Akohla, *The Footsteps of Ava* (Yangon: Catholic Major Seminary Press, 1974), 137.

(Percoto) soon was consecrated bishop on 31th January, 1768.”⁵¹ There was the first time in the history for the Christian in Burma to witness the consecration of a Bishop. The congregations, and those were present at those events, would never forget it.

In 1771, December 29, one more Barnabite Father from Italy arrived in Burma. Fr. Marcelo Cortenovis was assigned at Monhla Seminary. And also another father, Fr. Gaetano Mantegazza who was left from Italy at the time with Fr. Cortenovis in another way also arrived after him. He was assigned at Chan Tha village as a rector. So in 1772, it can be seen the Catholic organization and assignment of priests in Burma were as the following:

Bishop Percoto (Chairman)

Rev. Fr. Marcelo Cortenovis (the Seminary of Mon Hla)

Rev. Fr. Gaetano Mantegazza (Rector of Chan Tha village)

Rev. Fr. Antonio Filiberto Re (Rector of Ava)

Rev. Fr. Ambrogio Miconi (Rector of Chaung U)

Rev. Fr. Melchior Carpani (Rector of Rangoon)

Rev. Fr. Gherardo Cortenovis (Lower Burma)

Bro. Romualdo Bergonzi (Mon Hla and Ava)⁵²

Both the priests and the bishop were effectively working their mission in Burma such as using type writer in order to write Burmese languages. In 1776, the first book

⁵¹ Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar (CBCM), *The Official Catholic Directory* (Yangon: CBCM, 2007), 10.

⁵² Fr. Akohla, *The foot steps of Eva* (Yangon: Catholic Major Seminary Press, 1974), 147.

was printed in half of Burmese which were the successful sign of the work of bishop Percoto. Later on the bishop was able to write a book of scripture in three languages Burmese, Latin and Portuguese. Around this time three more Barnabite Fathers came to help the bishop in the different parts of Burma. Unfortunately, Bishop Percoto's health was not good enough and passed away in 12 December 1776. Fr. Gherardo Cortenovis succeeded as Vicar Apostolic in February of 1780; he was consecrated in India. But very sad indeed, after his consecration, on his way back to Burma, He felt sick and died on the way.⁵³

3.5.5 The Condition of the Barnabite Mission in Burma (1776-1782)

After the death of Bishop Percoto, only a very small number of missionaries were left in the country. Although three more Barnabites arrived, including Fr. Vincent Sangermano, the personnel for the Burmese mission dwindled due to the political turmoil in Italy which greatly affected the continuous sending of missionaries. These realities greatly affected the Barnabite mission. Barnabite vocations greatly decreased and during the General Chapter of the Barnabites under their superior General, Scipione M. Perruzini held in Rome in the year 1782, he decided to decrease the number of the foreign missionaries from the Congregation, and even withdrawing those who had been working abroad.

Having heard this decision made by his religious superiors, Fr. Gaetano Mantegazza, who was working in Burma, returned to Rome with the idea of asking permission to remain in Burma. During his trip to Rome (It took him 9 months to reach

⁵³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 163-166.

Rome accompany by two natives). He discussed with a Cardinal in Rome regarding the need of mission in Burma and since so many things had to be done there, he came back to Burma and with the help from Rome he renewed the work that had been done by bishop Percoto, and was able to reprint some books including Burma's two maps and the book of the Catechism⁵⁴.

Before he left Rome "Fr. Gaetano Mantegazza was ordained a bishop in 12 November 1786 with the right to succeed Bishop Gherardo Cortenovis"⁵⁵. There was also good news for him that all the decisions made concerning the Burma Mission during the General Chapter were abrogated. That was why when he returned to Burma, two more missionaries were allowed to accompany him back to the mission.

Mantegazza was the one who finished in the printing of the second book in Burmese. During his term as the Apostolic Vicar, three native Deacons were ordained priests. He passed away in August 4, 1794.

Marcelo Cortenovis (1797-1800)⁵⁶ became the next Vicar Apostolic. He came to the mission at the same time with Gaetano Mantegazza.

3.5.6 The Works of the Barnabites

Fr. Paolo Maria Nerini was the first to open the Orphanage School in Rangoon. But there was no teacher for the orphanage, so Fr. Paolo Maria Nerini opened another

⁵⁴ The books were printed in 1785 for the second time since the time of Bishop Percoto.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁵⁶ Cheney David M, *Catholic-Hierarchy*. Terminology/Site Help, 1996-2015 (accessed on Tuesday April 7, 2015).

school for the training of teachers with the subjects, such as Burmese, Mathematic, Geography and Science.

The work of Barnabites in Ava authored several fundamental values. Firstly, they wrote a Burmese dictionary, a Burmese grammar in Italian, a Latin-Portuguese-Burmese Dictionary which was the first book to be printed in Burma; it also contained a pioneering study of Burmese flora and fauna: a catalogue of local and exotic plants and animals (300 flowers and 200 animals). “Even more fundamental than that was the compilation of the first Burmese alphabet by Percoto, published in 1776 by the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda Fidei which produced in 60,000 Burmese, together with 40,000 Latin typographic characters.”⁵⁷

In addition to this, “Fr. Vincenzo Sangermano also wrote a celebrated book: “*Relation of the Burmese Kingdom*” (1808), and translated a book of laws, the *Dhammathat*, and a Buddhist cosmography with a History of Kings. His works were published posthumously in Rome, in 1833, with drawings prepared by students of Barnabite schools in Rangoon.”⁵⁸

3.5.7 St. John’s Minor Seminary

The most important institution established by the Barnabites in Burma was the foundation of the seminary.

The purpose of opening seminary was to recruit native vocations for the priesthood. The reasons of the establishment of the seminary can be explained in the

⁵⁷ Anthony M. Bianco, *A model Barnabite Mission* (Burma: C.R. S.P., 2012).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

fact that the missionaries knew that the political and social changes in Italy and in Europe during the period were not good signs that the Congregation or Propaganda Fidei could send personnel to work in Burma. Faithful to the directives of the Propaganda Fidei for the training of the native clergy, the Barnabites began to give formation to men who would later become priests.

In 1771, the Minor Seminary was opened by bishop Percoto in Mon Hla village (kingdom of Ava). In 1780 the Seminary transferred to Nabaca and latter in 1786 to Rangoon. No seminarian was recorded before the Seminary moved to Ragoon but after 1786 in Rangoon there were around 20 seminarians in 7 years and three of them were ordained to the priesthood in 1793 by Msgr. G. Mantegazza.

Between the years 1794-1802 the newly ordained native priests and Msgr. Marcelo Cortenovis continued their ministry in many places of the mission. Nevertheless, the political situation in Burma had gradually gone from bad to worse, especially when the British crown announced a war against Burma in 5 March, 1824.

During this period of war only three priests were left; and three years later, one more passed away, leaving two in Upper Burma. In 15 January, 1830, the formal announcement from Rome allowed the withdrawal of the Barnabite missionaries from Burma, officially ending their presence there. It was a sad day for the Church in Burma.

The Burmese mission was handed to the Clerics Regular of Pious Schools⁵⁹ under the direction of Msgr. Federico Cao with two other priests, Fr. Domenico Tarolli and Fr.

⁵⁹ Like the Barnabites, the Piarists were Clerics Regular. The official name of this Congregation is The Congregation of Clerics Regular of the Mother of God of Pious Schools, popularly known as

Antonio Ricca, in order to continue the work of the Barnabites. The situation continued until the arrival of the PIME missionaries by the early 20th century.

Today although very little is known about the Barnabite mission in Burma, their legacy continue to be an immeasurable contribution in the Christianization of the Burmese people. Their work of learning the culture, the printing of important books on Burmese culture and language as well as in the Ethnology of the peoples are very important for the missionaries who came later to continue their work in the country.

The second wave of Catholic Evangelization saw the preaching of the Gospel among the minorities. Though most Catholics today are ethnic minorities, the zeal of the early missionaries, their dedication and their organization continued to influence other religious congregations and missionary societies who continued the work during the British colonial era until today.

Despite the many difficulties, the numbers of Catholics and the organization of the Church in the country, reflect the foundation laid down by these missionaries.

Piarists or “Escolapios”. This Congregation was founded by a Spanish cleric, Saint Joseph Calansanz in Rome in the 16th century to open Pious Schools for poor children and do pastoral work.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BEGINNING OF THE PIME MISSION

Since the middle of the 19th century, the Italian PIME missionaries had done an important missionary work in Myanmar by proclaiming the Good News, baptizing the people and converting them from traditional religions to Christianity. Thus, it is good to recall what they have done and learn from their experiences. By allowing their works to be known to the people in Myanmar because many Christians, especially the young, have no idea how their forefathers received the Catholic faith.

The aim of this part is to provide background information about these Italian missionaries: PIME, especially the work of the pioneers and their activities.

1. A brief history of the PIME

PIME is an Italian Foreign Mission Society. The founder of the Institute was Monsignor Angelo Ramazzotti who was born in Milan, Italy, on August 3, 1800. He was a lawyer by profession who later entered the Seminary and was ordained a priest in 1829 after his graduation.”⁶⁰

He later joined the Oblates which he later served as Superior for three terms. “On May 20, 1850, Pius IX appointed him as Bishop of Pavia. He was consecrated on June 30, 1850. That same year, he founded of the Lombard Seminary for the Pontifical

⁶⁰ Eman Bonnici, *Monsignor Angelo Ramazzotti*: Record added: Mar 28, 2012 (accessed on Thursday April 9, 2015). <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?>

Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME)”⁶¹ to form Italian Priests and brothers to participate in the Missionary activity of the Church.

2. The arrival of the PIME Missionaries in Myanmar

2.1 Tungoo

The Holy See began to assign missionary areas for the PIME missionaries. They were entrusted to evangelize the whole North-eastern part of Burma. “The Missionaries of PIME were sent to Burma arriving Toungoo on March 8, 1868. Under the Leadership of Fr. Eugene Biffi began missionary activities developed fast.” The country was not only predominantly inhabited by Buddhists but also by animistic tribes who were divided and belligerent. “Fr. Biffi was the Superior of the PIME founders; Fathers Rocco Tornatore, Sebastiano Carbone and Tancredi Conti.”⁶² In 1870 Toungoo was made an Apostolic Prefecture with Mgr. Biffi as its first prefect.

The area originally assigned to PIME was the territory in East of “Salween”⁶³, at that time it was impossible to penetrate the area. Instead, they were therefore asked by Bishop Paul Ambrose Bigandet⁶⁴ to take care of the hills, west of Salween river as

⁶¹ *Ibid.*,

⁶² Saw Bartholomeo Pologwe, *A Short History of An Indigenous Missionary Country*, Diocese of Toungoo (Rome, P.U. Gregoriana, 1986), 102. See also Eddy Evans, *The Foreign Missions of Milan: P.I.M.E. 1868-1991: Missions of P.I.M.E in the Dioceses of Taunggyi, Toungoo, Kengtung, Loikaw, Pekhon and Lashio* (Sanvitese Press, 2011), 9.

⁶³ “Salween” is the longest river in Myanmar flowing from China along the way through the East to the south of Myanmar down to Bangladesh Ocean Sea. It is now known as Thanlwin.

⁶⁴ Paul Ambrose Bigandet was a member of the Paris Foreign Missionaries (MEP). In 1856 he was appointed Apostolic Administrator of Ava and Pegu while continuing in his post as coadjutor to the Bishop of Malaya. Cf. Saw Bartholomeo Pologwe, *Loc. cit.*; 74-57.

well as the mountains to the East offering “Moulmein”⁶⁵ or “Toungngu or Toungoo”⁶⁶ as their head-quarters. “Bishop Paul Ambrose Biganet said that foreign missionaries were described as *Kalas* or Western foreigners by native people in order to distinguish them.”⁶⁷ Toungngu became the centre of the PIME missions due to its convenience. From Toungoo the missionaries launched their ministry towards the hill tribes, in the Eastern Burma. Their apostolate was begun with the Ghekus. Fr. Sebastiano Carbone was posted at Leiktho, a little village of twelve families situated some 60 km from Toungoo, 800 meters above sea-level, while Fr. Rocco Tornatore set up his residence in a village some distance off; while the Superior Fr. Conti remained Toungoo.

2.2 Leiktho

Leiktho was among the White Karens, just beside the Ghekus. They speak a different dialect. In 1871, after learning both languages Mgr. Biff with Fr. Conti and Tornatore wanted to cross the Sittang River to undertake an exploratory tour among the uncivilized Red Karens. The British commissioner warned them not to go beyond their territory because if something had happened to the fathers, the British would not be able to protect them.⁶⁸ But the missionaries risked and went on their journey to the Red

⁶⁵ Formerly “Moulmein” is now known as “Mawlamyine.” It is the fourth largest city of Myanmar, situated 300 km south east of Yangon.

⁶⁶ “Toungngu or Toungoo” is the name of a city where PIME was first settled down. The name both Tanugngu and Toungoo is differently spelled by the different writers.

⁶⁷ Paul. Ambrose Biganet, *The Catholic Burmese Mission from the year 1720 to 1887* (Thailand: White Orchid Press, 1996), 3.

⁶⁸ Evans, *Loc., cit.*, 10.

Karen. Although they reached the Red Karen settlements, they were not able to do their work mission and returned to Toungoo.

2.3 New Missionaries arrive in Burma

Additional missionaries, from Milan, were sent out to Burma. In 1870, Fr. Goffred Conti, the brother of Tancredi, came out to Toungoo. In 1873, two very valuable lay-Brothers, Pompeo Nasuelli and Martino Frangi arrived in the Mission. Very sadly, Brother Martino died only two years after his arrival, at a young age of 23. The first ordination for Toungoo was that of a young Irishman named Edmund McCormick, a soldier in the British army, who asked to be a priest in the service of the Toungoo Mission. In 1876, Fr. Andrea Celanzi and Brother Francesco Gorla arrived; in 1877, Brother Giovanni Angelini and in 1888, Fr. Luigi Fabris.⁶⁹

In 1882 two more missionaries arrived; Frs. Gustavo Maria and Brother Ubaldo Zambelli. The latter was a teacher and catechist in the famous Oratory of St. Charles at Milan; by profession he was a master printer.⁷⁰ In response to the urgent appeal of Fr. Marinoni, the Superior General, for a printer to run the Catholic Press in Toungoo, he joined the Society and immediately came out to Burma. He brought out with him new machines and other goods for the Press. Mgr. Biffi had already put up a building 20 meters by 6 for the purpose and had installed his lithographic machines.

Now with new and more modern machines, the real printing started in the mission. Bro. Zambelli also accepted work from local businesses and soon had many

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

clients came to seek his services because his work was the best in Toungoo. With the profit, he was able to print many books and the Karen newspaper for the mission. When the British Government visited the press in 1882, and was deeply impressed with the good work and by seeing how well the Karen boys were composing, correcting and printing the texts in their own languages. As a result the captain of the British garrison gave all his printing jobs to the Catholic Press.⁷¹ In 1884 Fr. Vittorio Emmanuele Sagrada arrived in Toungoo.⁷²

3. The difficulties the PIME faced

Like all pioneering missionaries the PIME Fathers also suffered greatly for the Burmese mission. The diversity of tribes, the language, and the constant threat of tribal Wars World oftentimes would lead to bloodshed, the harsh weather and lack of modern hygiene in the hill territories remain constant challenges for the continuous work. All these, the Missionaries bore with Christian patience and courage for Christ and his Church.

Among the many difficulties they experienced, I would like to name three;

3.1 Disease and famine

There was a time of the most crises for the people in the villages near Toungoo as the follow:

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁷² Gregory Shwe Aung, *History of P.I.M.E in Myanmar (Burma): Dioceses of Toungoo, Keng Tung, Taunggyi, Lashio, Loikaw, Pekhoh* (Taunggyi: Archdiocesan Press, 2010), 62.

“In the years around 1871 to 1876 a vast number of rats descended on the district, following the flowering of a species of bamboo. The rats swarmed into the houses and fields consuming everything edible. In the district of Toungoo there were many villages where people were relying on their farms. They planted the paddies with beans, millet and the other crops. However, whatever they planted it was eaten by the mice. Cholera followed the wake of famine, many people died in those years. The missionaries tried to help as best they could, risking their lives.⁷³

The missionaries did whatever they could to help the starving people. Firstly, they made urgent appeals to Italy for help, which they got especially from Lombardy. They also appealed to the British Colonial Government for rice and to build a road so that food could be transported to the villages, at the same time giving the people work and a salary with which they could buy rice. Although the plague was within British territory, the Government graciously helped. The missionaries calculated that at least half of the Soku population was wiped out by this plague.

Simultaneous to this tragedy was the outbreak of disease. In 1872 cholera broke out, it took its toll on the people and did not spare the missionaries. At Toungoo, Mgr. Biffi isolated the sick children and cared for them himself until got so sick that the doctor despaired for his life.⁷⁴ The children stormed heaven with their prayers and Mgr. Biffi recovered.

⁷³ Pologwe, *Loc., cit.*, 19.

⁷⁴ Evans, *Loc., cit.*, 14.

All the efforts of the Missionaries, the Karens were not unappreciative for the work done in behalf. Yet out of this tragedy, God also blessed and rewarded their sacrifice. It is believed that in the first year of the famine, Mgr. Tornatore, the greatest figure during those sad times, received sixteen villages into the Church. In the next three years the figure grew to twenty-six and the number of catechumens multiplied in great number. For those who would say that the Church cashed in on the peoples' misery, this is untrue. What actually happened was the great men heroes walked the land in those sad times and the people, recognizing their calibre, threw in their lot with them.

3.2 The Second World War (1939-1945)

The Second World War (1939-1945) brought great disasters in Burma. Churches were bombed, foreign priests were deported, people were forced to flee to distant places and in several places priests, sisters and lay people were ruthlessly murdered. In 1945, when the war was over, the Catholic Church had difficult time reconstructing the churches, schools and parishes.⁷⁵

The “Loilem Leper Asylum was destroyed by Allied bombing. At the same time in the other side many of mission buildings in Toungoo town were burned down and by the retreating Chinese army in 1942 destroyed by subsequent bombing.” Such as Schools, “the orphanages, the central Clergy House, the Minor Seminary with the beautiful Church adjacent, and the Press building with all the machinery types and

⁷⁵ Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar (CBCM), *Official Catholic Directory* (Yangon: CBCM, 2009), 11.

stores were totally wiped out. All those building which were destroyed, were rebuilt and re-blessed around 1945-1949.”⁷⁶

3.3 Martyrdom

Lastly, the PIME presence was blessed with the glorious martyrdom of the missionaries which confirmed their work in Burma. On 24 May 2014, the Church officially proclaimed the PIME missionary, Fr. Mario Vergara to the altars together with the protomartyr of the nation, his catechist Isidore Ngei Ko Lat.

Fr. Mario Vergara arrived Burma in the year of 1934.⁷⁷ Bishop Alfredo Lanfranconi had invited Fr. Vergara to come to Pretholé the hillside district of the Karens which was about 2000 meters high⁷⁸. At the left side of the mountain was the broad plain of Loikaw inhabited by Red Karens and Shans in about 200 villages.⁷⁹ Fr. Vergara opened his mission in 1946 to win back the Catholics dispersed during the Japanese Occupation.

In 1949 the situation became precarious because of the Karen Revolt, headed by the Baptists, who had reached the area. Young Fr. Pietro Galastri, who had just arrived from Italy, was sent that year to help Fr. Vergara. He was a good carpenter and

⁷⁶ Catholic Major Seminary, Institute of Theology, Class dispense. *History of the Catholic Church in Burma (Myanmar)* (Yangon: Institute of Theology, 2000), 21.

⁷⁷ Shwe Aung, *Loc., cit.*, 138.

⁷⁸ Today this territory is within the Diocese of Loikaw, of those founded by the PIME missionaries.

⁷⁹ Evans, *Loc., cit.*, 93.

brick layer. He set down to work with his Karen workmen and soon put up the necessary buildings for the mission at Shadaw, a busy market town.

It was believed that in December 1949, Fr. Vergara and his catechists were invited to a meeting with the guerrillas and their chiefs. The purpose of the meeting was to persuade Fr. Vergara and his Catholics to join the revolt but he adamantly refused. The commander, known as Tire, a fanatical Baptist, who had always hated the Catholics and their missionaries in particular, was very angry at all sorts of insults on him. In January 1950, the Government troops recaptured the city of Loikaw. The mission of Fr. Vergara was divided into two cutting it off from Loikaw from where all supplies had to come. Word was spread that the two Italian priests were spies for the Burmese Government. On May 11, 1950 the Karen rebels tried to retake Loikaw but were defeated, leaving many of their men dead on the battlefield. The survivors fled to the mountains.⁸⁰

“In May 24, 1950, Fr. Vergara was invited to meet Tire. He went with his catechist, Isidore, and met Richmond, another fanatical Baptist rebel leader,”⁸¹ infamous for his violence and cruelty, who accused him of being a spy for the Burmese and of other crimes although he was far away from the fighting in his mission. He and Isidore were handcuffed and taken to the forest which was 24 kilometres from the River Salween.⁸² Then the rebels went to the mission to find Fr. Galastri, who was praying in

⁸⁰ Cf. Edward P. Evans, “Pontificio Istituto Missioni Estere (PIME): The Foreign Mission of Milan (P.I.M.E) in Myanmar” *National Church History of Myanmar*: ed. Peter Sein Haling Oo (Yangon: St. Joseph’s Catholic Major Seminary November 2014), 836.

⁸¹ Evans, *Loc. cit.*, 94.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 94. See also Shwe Aung, *Loc. cit.*, 139.

the church. He was told to walk while the rebels held the bayonet behind his back. When they reached the river, “the two priests and Isidore were shot, put into bags and thrown into the Salween.”⁸³

Another missionary worth mentioning here is Fr. Alfredo Cremonesim who gave his life while working in the village of Donoku, in 1953. His mission was Donoku where is situated a bit south of Toungoo between battle range of the Government troops and the Karen rebels and for this reason he and the villagers had to flee to Toungoo for safety. Most houses and other things in the village were burnt and destroyed. “It is said that he was strongly advised not to return to Donoku but in 1952, he returned to celebrate Holy Week and Easter with his flock.”⁸⁴ Many people came back to the village and rebuild their houses. One day the rebels made incursion into a Burmese village, Htantabin near by Donoku and when the government troops heard about it, they followed the rebels’ tracks as they arrived Donokhu they went straight to the presbytery. During that time Fr. Alfredo Cremonesim was present as presbytery was accused of assisting the rebels while Fr. Alfredo Cremonesim defending presbytery “telling the soldiers that he and all the villages had nothing to do with the fighting. The Burmese soldiers riddled his body with bullets and he fell dead.”⁸⁵

⁸³ Catholic Major Seminary, Institute of Theology, Class dispense. *History of the Catholic Church in Burma (Myanmar)* (Yangon: Institute of Theology, 2000), 19.

⁸⁴ Evans, *Loc., cit.*, 94.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

CHAPTER THREE

THE METHOD AND SUCCESS OF THE PIME MISSION IN MYANMAR

The people of God are sent as a community through the times and nations with the good news of God's plan for man, what might be called wayfaring virtues have an important place in the spirituality of Mission. Mission is carried out in hope, the people of God travel the road with the confidence in the guidance of the Spirit, both looking towards and working for the promises of God. The spirit of adaptation, accommodation, and enculturation is also grounded in wayfaring to the mission. Since a missionary work is a God-directed project and process through time.⁸⁶

Before moving to the points of Methodology of PIME mission, first of all, it is good to clarify the meaning of "mission" and "missions." Many people do not distinguish these two words properly. Mission in singular and missions in plural is not the same. It is true that by adding "s" to the word "mission", it becomes plural "missions" but the meaning is totally different from each other. So what is the different between Mission and Missions?

1. Mission and Missions

"Mission" is a special duty or task received, a sending out or being sent out with authority to perform a special duty, function, or a special task. Therefore, "mission"

⁸⁶ Michael Collins Reilly, S.J. *Spirituality for Mission*; Historical, Theological, and Cultural Factors for a Present-Day Missionary Spirituality (New York, Orbis Books: Maryknoll, 1978), 146.

refers to a specific task a person needs to accomplish. On the other hand, “missions” is defined as “organized missionary work, especially for spreading Christianity:

"Mission" is among other things "a sending out or being sent out with authority to perform a special duty ... the special duty or function on which someone is sent as a messenger or representative ... the special task or purpose for which a person is apparently destined in life; calling: as, he considered it his *mission* to educate the ignorant." The key word is the word "special." Mission is a special duty, a special function, or a special task. As such mission refers to one specific task that a person wants to accomplish. "Missions" on the other hand is defined as "organized missionary work, especially for spreading Christianity. Or, as Dir. Irwin Steele, former missionary to Latin America, explains, "Someone has given the following definition: 'Christian missions is the proclamation of the Gospel to the unconverted in all the world, according to the command of Christ.'" It would seem that "someone" was Robert Hall Glover who said, "'Christian Missions' is the Proclamation of the Gospel to the Unconverted Everywhere According to the Command of Christ."⁸⁷

2. Mission of Jesus

Vatican II saw the Church's mission to be rooted in Christ's sending the apostles just as he himself had been sent by the Father.⁸⁸ By its very nature the Church is on mission to the whole world.⁸⁹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21).

Jesus said that he must proclaim the Good News of the kingdom of God that is what he was sent to do.⁹⁰ Christ has just applied to himself the words of Prophet Isaiah:

⁸⁷ Edward Paauwe, *The Burning Bush: Mission or Missions*. Vol. 9. No. 1, (Far Eastern Bible College: Jan 2003). (Accessed on 19 May 2015). http://www.febc.edu.sg/bbvol9_1c.htm

⁸⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, 17.

⁸⁹ *Ad Gentes*, 2. 10.

⁹⁰ Cf. Luke 4:43.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted” (Is 61:1). “Going from town to town, preaching to the poorest and frequently the most receptive the joyful news of the fulfilment of the promises and of the Covenant offered by God is the mission for which Jesus declares that he is sent by the Father.”⁹¹ Jesus wants all of His people to be saved and to know the truth. His desire is to tell the people that there is only one God and only one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human.⁹² God loves us so much so that He sent His only Son to us to do the mission. After doing his mission on earth, the Son was back to the Father, he and His Father send the Holy Spirit to continue the work or mission of the Son. Therefore, the mission of the Holy Spirit is to tell the people that God loves us. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age’” (Matthew 28: 18-20).

Missions, Divine: On the eve of Jesus’ Passion and death, He said that after ascending to His Father, he will send the Holy Spirit upon His Church to teach her all

⁹¹ David J. O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, (New York: Mary Knoll, Orbis Books, 1992), 305.

⁹² Cf. 1 Timothy 2:4-5.

the truth. The sending or procession of the second and third persons of the Trinity by the Father in eternity and the time. “I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete to be with you for ever” (John 14: 26). The Holy Spirit whom the Fathers will send in Jesus’ name will teach the Apostles everything, and be with them. It is certainly that the Apostles and even the world will not see Jesus after His ascending to His Father but knowing that through the Holy Spirit, He abides in the Apostles and the Church.

3. Evangelization of Cultures

The Gospel certainly cannot be identified with any culture, the same can also be said regarding the kingdom which the Gospel proclaims. As a result, this difference between the Gospel and culture is, without doubt, the drama of our time, just as it was of the others times. Therefore, Effort must be made to ensure the evangelization of the different cultures. They have to be regenerated by and encounter with the Gospel. But this encounter will not take place if the Gospel is not proclaimed.

The way of transmission of the Gospel person to person, remains valid and important. For example, our Lord Jesus Christ often used this way with Nicodemus, Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman, Simon the Pharisee and the Apostles as well. Take the priests as an example, it can never sufficiently praises those priests, who through the Sacrament of Penance or through pastoral dialogue, show their readiness to guide people in the ways of the Gospel, to support them in their efforts, to raise them up if they have fallen, and always to assist them with discernment and availability⁹³ In Myanmar, according to Bishop Sotero Phamo, the study of Burmese cultures is of great

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 320.

importance. He recognizes the pioneering work of many Catholic missionaries in such studies and encourages its continuation⁹⁴

Whenever missionaries arrived, they had to found community giving preference to be led by the chief of the villages. Just like St. Paul wherever he founded Christian community, he placed a body of Presbyters (elders) at its head, he himself retaining the overseer ship over all.⁹⁵ So to achieve proclaiming the Word of God to the people, what methods are needed? Pope Paul VI once stated that “the conditions of society in which we live oblige all of us therefore to revise methods, to seek by every means to study how we can bring the Christian message to modern man. For it is only in the Christian message that modern man can find the answer to his questions and the energy for his commitment of human solidarity.”⁹⁶ For example, in the time of Jesus, he proclaims the Gospel telling simple stories like parables to let the people understand easily about God, the Father. Thus, how do the PIME fathers succeed their mission in Myanmar?

⁹⁴ Cf. John C., England, Jose Kuttianimattathil sdb, John Mansford Prior svd, Lily A. Quintos rc, David Suh Kwang-Sun, Janice Wickeri, *Asian Christian Theologies: A Research Guide to Authors, Movements, Souch. Vol 2: Southeast Asia*, (Delhi: ISPCK/ Claretian, Orbis Books, 2003), 100.

⁹⁵ Cf. John Laux. M. A., *Church History: A Complete History of the Catholic Church to the present Day* (New York: Illinois, Rockford, 1989), 27.

⁹⁶ Paul VI, *Address to the College of Cardinals* (June 22, 1973): AAS 65 (1973), 383.

4. The Reason of PIME Success

4.1 Inculturation

The missionaries not only learned and perfected the language, they also devised a method of transliteration to preserve many of the tribal dialects and used them as instruments of evangelization.

Perhaps without the efforts of the missionaries, these dialects which are intimately connected to the tribal cultures would be lost forever.

The missionaries first of all would study the language and customs of the tribes. Then they would create an alphabet for the various dialects. “Mgr. Biffi introduced English Characters for the local language, rightly or wrongly.” Father G. Conti became the producer of Karen Catholic literature. He wrote a catechism, Bible History, books on doctrine, hymn-books, prayer-books, and a translation of St. Mathew’s Gospel. He also turned out a complete set of school books and founded a magazine called “The Light of the Hills”.⁹⁷

Both Frs. Carbone and Tornatore were Piedmontese and they were a perfect little team. Fr. Carbone, a man of letters, good at languages, instructed the families at Leiktho and in the surrounding villages. In those days there was no written language among the Hill Karens. Fr. Carbone invented the writing for the White Karens using Latin characters and conventional signs for the tones and accents. Next he compiled a

⁹⁷ Catholic Major Seminary, Institute of Theology, Class dispense. *History of the Catholic Church in Burma (Myanmar)* (Yangon: Institute of Theology, 2000), 19.

grammar and dictionary in Italian and White Karen for the use of the missionaries who would come later.⁹⁸

4.2 Basic health care

The Missionaries did not forget the need of human promotion especially basic health care. Fr. Tornatore was a well-known physician. Medicine was an important means of conversion. When people got sick, they usually went to the Shaman, called the Bikui, who would drive out the evil spirits through a ritual of prayers and ceremonies over the sacrifice of chickens and buffalos, for which they charged sums that the poor people could ill afford. He had a good knowledge of medicine and visited the Karen villages, curing the sick and giving them medicine for the common sickness of the villages. He was also a good dentist, an expert herbalist. He prepared many medicines himself for the people.⁹⁹ Medicine was an important means of conversion. With the medicines of Fr. Tornatore, they would be cured for free. He said to them that evil spirit had nothing to do with the sickness. Diseases and sickness could be cured by the medicines.

“Shamanism is popularly practiced in Burmese Nat Worship. The “*Nat-kadaws*” in Myanmar play the significant role of Shamans.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Evans, *Loc., cit.*, 11.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰⁰ Simon. Pau Khan En, *Nat Worship: A Paradigm for Doing Contextual Theology in Myanmar*, (Yangon: Judson Research Center of the Myanmar Institute of Theology, 2012), 403.

5. Opening new missions: Keng Tung

The Main task of the PIME mission was to explore “Keng Tung.”¹⁰¹ But due to many difficult reasons, they could not enter Keng Tung and could only settle in Toungoo. Nevertheless, the Fathers never forgot that their real mission. Bishop Rocco Tornatore made three attempts to reach the Salween. “Firstly, there was in 1894, but failed. Secondly, in 1895 it was also failed. Finally, he succeeded in crossing the Salween and reaching Keng Tung in 1896.”¹⁰² It is believed that he was badly injured when he fell from his pony and he could not continue his journey but only his companions, a priest and a lay-brother continued and come to their journey to Keng Tung.

6. The congregations of Sisters are brought in

The missionaries believed that the presence of women missionaries would be an effective means of evangelization. Mgr. Biffi had written several times to his Society in Milan asking for Sisters should be sent out for the education of girls. Finally, two French Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition arrived in 1877 and opened an orphanage with 30 pupils and a day school at Toungoo.¹⁰³ This later became the famous Convent-School administered by them.

¹⁰¹ Keng Tung is formally also known as Keng Toung or Kengtung but now is called Kyaing Tong.

¹⁰² Evans, *Loc., cit.*, 106.

¹⁰³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 18.

Bishop Rocco Tornatore brought another congregation of the Women-Religious: the Reparation Sister because the Sisters of St. Joseph were too few. “The first six Sisters left Milan for Toungoo on September 29, 1895 accompanied by the 23-year-old newly ordained priest, Father Paolo Manna. They were the first Sisters who would work alongside the PIME in the most difficult terrain of the Karen Hills and in the Shan States.”¹⁰⁴

The names of the six Sisters are listed as following;

1. M. Maria Amali Nazari
2. M. Carlotta Mazari
3. M. Giuseppina Archangela Santini
4. M. Monica Cazzaniga
5. M. Lucia Giacomelli
6. M. Maria Lucia Gussago¹⁰⁵

In 1899 the first convent school was opened at Leiktho. In 1896 mission station at Yedashe, 25 miles North of Toungoo to take care of the Karens who had come down to plains to earn a livelihood. In 1897 the first indigenour priests of the Vicariate were ordained and a Minor Seminary was opened at Toungoo which functioned only for five years.¹⁰⁶ According to the 25th Anniversary Magazine from Loikaw Diocese (2014), the number of Sisters’ convents up to date are; the Diocese of Toungoo (18) convents,

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁰⁵ Loikaw Diocese, *Magazine published for the 25th anniversary of the diocese* (1989-2014), 54.

¹⁰⁶ Anonymous, *The Early Catholic Missionaries in Burma and History of The Catholic Church in Burma* (Myanmar), 20.

Taungyi (4), Phekho (6), Loikaw (14), Lashoe (8), Rangon (4), Myikyina (2), Mandalay (1), Bamaw (2), Kyintoo (2). The list stated that in 2013, the number of Sisters are 463. The centre of Reparation Sister superior' resident is St. Joseph, situated in Taungoo.¹⁰⁷

7. Formation of the local vocations to the Priesthood and Catechists

One of the principal priorities of the PIME mission was the formation of the local clergy. This had been adopted in accordance to the directives of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith since the end of the 19th century. With this in mind, one of Bishop Eugene Biffi's first act was to open a school in Toungoo and asked Fr. Goffredo Conti to take charge. It is said that in the first year there were only three students. Only in 1871 after the disease and famine, the numbers of the students increased to 200. The name of school was R.C.M. Besides R.C.M. another school, St. Aloysius Middle School and St. Joseph High school were opened.¹⁰⁸

In 1924 August 15, the Seminary was opened in the village called *Htee Ni Gone* in Toungoo. It was called The Infant Jesus Minor Seminary. Fr. Ernesto Raimondi was in charge. The seminary lasted for only ten years, for in 1934, it was moved to another place called *Mine Da Queen* which was also near Toungoo. The Seminary was called St. Theresa's Minor Seminary. Fr. Luigi Bignamini was the first Rector of the Seminary.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Loikaw Diocese, *Magazine published for the 25th anniversary of the diocese* (1989-2014), 52-54, especially page 54.

¹⁰⁸ Shwe Aung, Loc., *cit.*, 51.

After many years of opening Seminary, the native seminarians were ordained by Bishop Emmanuel Sagrada as followed:

Name	ordination	death
Fr. Joseph Akin	6-2-1927	22-3-1978
Fr. Luigi	26-1-1930	1-9-1965
Fr. Moses Shwe Ko	26-1-1930	7-1-1983
Fr. Carlo Kodo	12-10-1931	29-3-1973
Fr. Alessio	3-10-1936	20-1-1974
Fr. Stephen	3-10-1936	28-12-1992
Fr. Simone Kike	8-12-1938	16-3-1960 ¹⁰⁹

Simultaneous to the opening of the Seminary was the establishment of the Catechist's School which will help in the evangelization of the region. Knowing that few missionaries would be coming and native vocations might not be many, well formed Catechists were needed. "A school for the training of Catechist was opened in Yedashe in 1929. After Second War World, Msgr A. Lanfranconi moved the school to Kayah (formal Karenni) Mosaw"¹¹⁰ and later to Dongankha Deemosoe to this day.

On Jan 24, 1909, Fr. Vittorio Emmanuele Sagrada succeeded Bishop Rocco Tornatore who died in Jan 6, 1908. During his term as the Apostolic vicar (about forty years), it is believed that mission only lost six priests. For this reason he was able to send spare missionaries for the Ken Tung area. He sent three priests to open mission stations in 1912. Ken Tung separated from Toungoo in 1927. He opened Hwary in 1909, Tithawas in 1915, Musaw in 1916, Dorokhu in 1928, Taunggyi in 1930 and

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 57

Loikaw in 1933, four local priests were ordained.¹¹¹ Among all these places, Dorokhu was a most productive local priests and different congregations of Sisters. Dorokhu is still as parish comprised of around ten villages. It is well known place because of the church as well as the Grotto which were built by PIME Fathers. Other than that the PIME Fathers also have brought six bells from Italy for Dorokhu. But one was broken after falling for the tower of the Church. It is believed that the sounds of the remaining five bells are the best comparing to the other Churches in Myanmar.

The number of Sisters also increased as convent Schools were opened at Kalaw (St. Agnes) in 1924, Taungyi in 1930. Cement-block making machines were introduced by Father Peano: Lay Brothers operated them, erected solid and fine buildings at moderate cost.

8. Loilem

Msgr Emmanuele Sagraa wanted to open a Leper Asylum in Toungoo town but the Municipal authorities would not grant the permission. But the British Commissioner of Toungoo was favourable to the Bishop's plan of opening a leper asylum. A Sawbwa of Loilem offered a site near Loilem and a colony was opened by Fr. Rocco Perego on July 24, 1938.¹¹² Italian Sisters of Charity took charge.

¹¹¹ Catholic Major Seminary, Institute of Theology, Class dispense. *History of the Catholic Church in Burma (Myanmar)* (Yangon: Institute of Theology, 2000), 20. All those places are located in the eastern part of Myanmar between Toungoo and Ken Tung. Those places are parishes now except Ken Tung, Taunggyi, and Loikaw, which are dioceses.

¹¹² *Ibid.* See also Evans, *Loc., cit.* 71.

The PIME missionaries have worked in Eastern Burma from 1868 among the primitive hill tribes and have raised their standard noticeably despite the poverty of the mission. The mission has so much developed up to the present. In 2007, the chapter of PIME in Burma closed. The last missionaries have died but they can say mission accomplished.¹¹³

¹¹³ Cf. Edward P. Evans “Pontificio Istituto Missioni Estere (PIME), The Foreign Mission of Milan (P.I.M.E) in Myanmar,” *National Church History of Myanmar*, ed. Fr. Peter Sein Hlaing Oo (L. H. E.). (Yangon: St. Joseph’s Catholic Major Seminary, 2014), 894-895. See also Evans, E. P., *History of the Catholic Church in Burma (1856-1966)* (Veneto: San Vito di Cadore, 2012), 491-492.

CONCLUSION

It is a great privilege to do this research about the mission of Myanmar, particularly about the mission of PIME. By doing this research and before go directly talking about the mission of the PIME, the researcher tried to present the historical background of the early Christianity in Myanmar. The early missionaries were very important for the Burmese people, particularly the Portuguese missionaries, such as: the Franciscans, the Dominicans and the Jesuits. Even the Portuguese soldiers, they also played a very important role for the Church in Myanmar in the past. The reason is, it was because of the Portuguese soldiers, that missionaries came in order to take care of them as their chaplains. Since the time of Portuguese, the Christians were mainly concentrated in the middle of Myanmar, or among the Burmese people, but not among the ethnic groups.

After that, many missionaries from different congregations came to Myanmar. Among them, the missionaries of the PIME were the main helpers for the hill people who suffered from the consequences of the Second World War, and many natural calamities, such as famine, plagues of rats and sickness. The PIME Fathers were also the main agents for the education of the people.

The PIME mission covered the whole of Eastern Burma which is divided into six dioceses, namely: Toungoo (1961), Keng Tung (1955), Lashio (1976), Loikaw (1989), Phekho (2006) and the Archdiocese of Taunggyi (1955). There were at least 133 PIME missionaries came to Burma for the evangelization of the country, and at

least half of them sacrificed their lives during their missions. Five of these missionaries, one native priest and one catechist suffered martyrdom.

The Catholic population has increased by thousands. New parishes have been opened and all of them completed with Church, house, school, orphanage and also small hospitals. Some of properties of the Church and school were confiscated by the Government later. The Minor Seminary, after the destruction of the building at Toungoo, was moved to Leiktho and then to Dorokhu. The number of indigenous priests rose. The Sisters of the Reparation did wonderful work in towns and on the hills.

All in all, due to the high technology, young people are not interested in religion, consequently, it is more challenging to do mission in Myanmar today. I hope and pray that this paper about those PIME missionaries who have been worked in Myanmar from 1868 till recently, will be useful for someone who is not familiar about it. Hoping that this paper will keep alive the memory of the good examples of those people who announced Jesus Christ brought His Church to Myanmar.

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